

Recycling center turns trash into cash

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NAVAL BASE SAN DIEGO

- In the dark ages, people believed alchemy could turn base metals to gold. Belief in alchemy died with the dark ages, but for the past 15 years the Navy has found a way to turn trash into cash - a modern alchemy called recycling.

Ted Schleutker, business manager at Naval Base San Diego's Solid Waste Manage-



Ted Schleutker, business manager of innovative diversion at Naval Base San Diego's Regional Recycling Facility, stands before bales of freshly packaged recycled material while talking to Bob Lawrence, a reporter from 10 News April 21.

ment Facility said, "Our concern, first and foremost, is the environment. But when we can find markets for material that otherwise would be thrown away, we've created an additional motive, a profit motive, for keeping the environment clean and healthy. The material has value, whether its scrap metal, various types of plastics, glass or what-have-you."

With its worldwide footprint and presence in all parts of the globe and on the seven seas, the Navy recognized its responsibility to be an environmental steward and took it upon itself to manage the waste from their bases. The result is a world class solid waste management facility; an enterprise that actually makes money from trash by finding buyers for the tons of discarded material generated on the bases throughout the San Diego area.

When enough material is collected and properly packaged it becomes raw material for some production process someplace in the world. That means Naval Base San Diego isn't just in the recycling business, they're in the commodities business. The material is collected, separated, packaged and sold on the commodities market. According to Schleutker, "Our goal is to reach out and touch everyone on the all the Navy bases in the area."

They've found new uses for just about everything: cardboard, metal, glass, bottles, cans, toner cartridges, lead acid batteries, wood, paper and grass clippings. It all gets collected, separated, baled, stored and sold.

Last year this effort kept 10,000 tons of metal, plastic, wood, and fiber out of the local landfills and another 18,000 tons of concrete and asphalt - a total

of 28,000 tons that otherwise would have been dumped, a diversion rate of almost 65 percent.

And just as important to the Navy is that this effort doesn't cost the taxpayer anything. "We pay for ourselves; we are fully funded by the revenue we generate. With whatever little money is left over we fund other environmentally friendly events - anything from pollution prevention to energy conservation projects, fun runs to earth day events; from air shows for sailors to corporate sponsorship of MWR events. Any good sponsorship event where we can participate and help spread the word about recycling is a legitimate reason for our financial support."

The facility is so concerned with being environmentally friendly even their administration building is built out of recycled material. Schleutker said, "The carpet was soda bottles, the bathroom partitions were milk cartons, the floor tiles were glass, the drywall was discarded drywall and all the steel for the building was recycled. You could say here at Naval Base San Diego, we don't just talk about recycling, we live it."

Editor's Note: As a result of its environmental stewardship, Navy Region Southwest Commander Rear Adm. Len Hering received the City of San Diego's 2008 Recycling Champion Award during a San Diego City Council meeting April 22. The Recycling Champion Award is given to one individual who displays a vision and commitment for the environment that will positively impact the San Diego community.